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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAMA 000660

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: GRADING BAHRAIN'S PARLIAMENT

REF: MANAMA 342

Classified By: Ambassador Adam Ereli for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY -----

- 1.(C) As Bahrain's parliament nears the end of its second full session since being restored in 2002, it has lived both up, and down, to expectations.
- 2.(C) Following the death of Emir Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa in 1999, Emir (now King) Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa embarked on a program of reform and modernization.
- 3.(C) From the government's perspective, parliament has done what it was intended to do. It has contributed to internal security and stability and has been a key element in the country's development.
- 4.(C) The appointed Shura Council is the most direct of those limitations. Chosen personally by the King, its members are considered to be the most loyal and capable.
- 5.(C) The Bahrain of 2009 is a far cry from the unrest of the 1990s. State security courts have been abolished, street protests are considered a thing of the past, and the country has experienced a period of relative peace and stability.
- 6.(C) MPs have in many ways taken on the role of tribal MANAMA 00000660 002 OF 003 elder, receiving constituents in their weekly majlis meetings and addressing their concerns.
- 7.(C) From the voter's perspective, parliament appears less successful. The elected Council of Representatives, in particular, has been subject to criticism for its perceived lack of independence and its failure to address key issues.
- 8.(C) Despite all this, there are signs that the parliament is learning how to behave as a genuinely representative body. Within the limited scope of its powers, it has been able to pass legislation that has improved the lives of Bahraini citizens.
- 9.(C) Similarly, MPs fought for, and won, a government concession on the budget. When the proposed budget did not include a BD 50 million provision for the development of the capital, the MPs successfully lobbied for its inclusion.
- 10.(C) Aside from a few public statements encouraging Sunnis to work together in the 2010 election, MPs from the Sunni blocs have been tightly controlled and their voices have been largely silenced.
- 11.(C) In broad terms, Bahrain's seven-year-long parliamentary experience has been successful. It has provided an open, albeit controlled, forum for the expression of public opinion and has been a key element in the country's development.
- 12.(C) On a more practical level, there are positive signs that the process is maturing, but there is clearly much room for improvement. Winning the trust of the Bahraini people will be a long and difficult process.